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*“The last resort? Initial findings of a PhD study exploring the circumstances, and motivations, of non- resident fathers taking on the full time care of their children through the involvement of Social Services”.*

Lee Sobo-Allen – PhD student (P/T) – Cardiff University

[Sobo-AllenLS@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Sobo-AllenLS@cardiff.ac.uk)

Senior Lecturer in Social Work – Leeds Beckett University

[l.s.sobo-allen@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:l.s.sobo-allen@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)







"My Dad was like a father figure to me"  
(Mike Bassett, England Manager 2001)



I am your father.





“In child protection services, the limited research which exists suggests that men who wish to care for children have to struggle to be seen as resources by professionals even in situations where mothers cannot look after children safely”  
(Ashley et al 2006)



# Barriers to engaging with fathers

## – Research findings

- Gendered Discourse (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004, Scourfield 2006, Zanoni et al 2013)
- ‘Dangerous Masculinities’
  - Appearance /Categorization - construction through the attribution of physical characteristics (Scourfield 2001, 2006 Featherstone 2003, Ferguson & Hogan, 2004)
  - Fear of men/Men as a risk - Actual / Perceived violence (O’Hagan 1997, Featherstone 2003)
- Men as no use / Men as irrelevant / Men as no different to woman (Scourfield 2001, 2003, 2006)
- SW’s distrust as men as carers and what they report to social workers (Ashley et al 2006, Dominelli et al 2011, Storhaug and Oien, 2012)
- Men avoiding social workers/Men not seeing themselves as carers (Maxwell et al 2012, Storhaug and Sobo-Allen 2017)

# My PhD study - A positivist stance?

“...the longstanding issue of ‘father engagement’ is better understood as an interactive, two-directional process, rather than a ‘problem’ with either men or social workers.(Brandon et al 2017)

“Fathers in Child Protection are rarely either ‘all bad’ or ‘all good’. Fathers are important to children, and (like mothers) most present a combination of positive and negative factors. Men and social workers need to recognise and work with this so that, wherever possible, children can stay safe and be involved with their fathers.”  
(Brandon et al 2017)

# My PhD study

- Dearth of studies that have explicitly looked from the perspective of the father, or specifically recruited them as study participants (Storhaug and Sobo-Allen 2017)
- Data Production with fathers (previously non-resident) who now have their child/ren living with them through the intervention of Social Services
  - Public Law Outline/Care Proceedings
  - Supporting Child Arrangement Order/Private Law
- Purposive sampling - 'Hard to reach' group - so numbers are limited
- Recruited through Social Services and third sector organisations
- Explore 'what works' rather than focusing upon barriers to engagement/outcome

# My PhD study

- *Explore the experiences and motivations of non-resident fathers in becoming the full time carers for their children.*
- Narrative approach to interviews & Timeline co-construction (Berends 2011, Sheridan et al 2011)
- Positionality - father, personal history, child protection social worker,
- “Making the familiar strange” – use narrative approach (not inquisitorial/assessment) and visual methods (Mannay 2010)
- Non-confrontational – joint production with the timeline becoming the focus
- *Explore the experiences of the social workers and their understanding of what factors helped in the outcome of the child/ren living with their father*
- Semi-structured interviews with the Social Workers responsible for this intervention



# The Fathers

- 13 fathers (more would have been good!)
- Ranging from 25 to 54 years of age
- Children range from 12 months old to 11 years of age
- 12 single fathers
- 2 non-biological fathers
- 10 unemployed, 1 receiving disability benefits, 1 employed, 1 self employed
- 11 White British, 1 White Irish, 1 North African
- In all cases the mothers experienced mental health problem and drug misuse

# The Findings

The fathers' experiences of, and motivations, for engaging with social services

The day to day experiences and feelings of the fathers in caring for their children

The experiences and motivations for the social workers to work with these fathers

## Emerging themes – “The Last Resort”

- Lee: Yes. At what point did you think, yes I'm going to do it?
- Abdel: *I can't honestly, I see her as my daughter like she's going to go then...you know I was thinking if she go... the more, you know I'm thinking that's it I'm going to lose her forever. So I was thinking I had to do it. So that's it, I did it for her*
- Lee: Yes, because I suppose they would have been looking at probably adoption, wouldn't they?
- Abdel: Yes, they were looking for adoption, obviously.
- Lee: As a baby, as a baby, yes.
- Abdel: Yes. Because I was looking at giving her to my mum back home, but they said they don't want that. **Even the solicitor told me not a chance to... So, that meant only me or the adoption.**
- Lee: Yes
- Abdel: *The best solution we got.*

# “The Last Resort”

- Liam: Well basically, **she said look you're going to have to get them or they're going to end up taking them.** I said, oh don't be silly because obviously I didn't think it was as bad as that but obviously, it was to do with her so she knows how bad it is. **She went on telling me, if you don't come for them they're going to take them,** and I thought I can't call her bluff because if they take them sometimes it's a lot harder to get them, whereas if I just go up there and get them I don't have a fight on my hands, you know.
- Liam: **Because the other option wasn't even an option, you know. They'd have ended up in care** *and to be fair she's got to think herself lucky because if they had gone in to care the chances of her ever getting them back would have been slim. So, you know, she's got to think herself lucky in that. While I've got them, there's always a chance. If they go into the care system, it's hard to get them back.*





# Looking to the future

- Actual and anticipatory loss of their children going into care
- Studies suggest Non resident fathers have already experienced emotional loss
  - at the time of separation from their children (Hallman et al. 2007; Mercadante et al. 2014)
  - through not being able to see their children on a daily basis (Kruk 1993,1994; Hallman et al. 2007)
  - loss of identity and role due to the reduction in parental time (Hallman et al. 2007; Troilo and Coleman 2012; Olmstead et al. 2009)
  - loss of child father attachment (Kruk 2010, 2011)
  - loss over not been able to live with their children again (Cameron et al. 2012)
  - loss of control and authority with decisions relating to the their children and family (Umberson and Williams 1993; Kielty 2006)



# Looking to the future

- “Indeed, thinking futures and making futures can be seen as the *raison d’etre* of child protection practices: these practitioners are ‘specialists of the future’ (Morris 2018)

# Anticipatory loss of role

- Lawrence: *There has been stages where I've thought I just can't cope.*
- Lee: *Yeah. So, what has kept you going?*
- Lawrence: ***I've always thought that I don't want my children to end up in care, because if they do go in care, then I won't see them all the time, and I have always seen my children all the time . Even in the past, I've had a full-time job and I've still seen them Friday to Sunday.***
- Lee: *Yeah.*
- Lawrence: ***And I've always had them, so I didn't like the thought of somebody else having a say about my own children over me.***
- Lee: *Right, yeah, the foster carers?*
- Lawrence: ***Are taking over a dad's job, because I'm their dad, and I didn't want anybody else to take over that job of being their full-time carer.***

“Stigma -Negative perception of the care system”

- Lee: *What would you have felt like if they had gone into care, as a father? What are your thoughts about that?*
- Lawrence: ***I would have felt down. I would have been sick, I'd have been crying. I would have been sad.***
- Lee: *Why is that do you think?*
- Lawrence: ***Because I don't think any children should end up in care, you always see on the news, don't you, care isn't good for children? Even on TV soaps it says care isn't good for children. I have talked to people, you see it in the paper, all the stories about care aren't good. Nine times out of ten, the children end up having no life, on drugs, in prison, being abused. So, it isn't a good place for children to go, care.***



# Self-censure and maintaining the moral self – “The Fight”

- ‘The Fight’ (Clifton 2012) where it was crucial, for a number of the fathers, that they were depicted as fighting for, or having fought for their child to prevent the adoption
- “...a number of participants imagined that their child, assuming that they met again, would need to be convinced that their birth father had fought to keep them” (Clifton 2012 pg.47)
- Anticipatory guilt and shame?

## Self-censure and maintaining the moral self- “The Fight” - anticipatory guilt

- Lee: *So in terms of your motivation, you're saying it was never an issue. You've not seeing him for three years but was there any thoughts that 'I don't know if I want to do this' ?*
- Neil: *No, that never entered my mind. I always said if it comes to it I'll take him and look after him.*
- Lee: *Why was that? Why did you think?*
- Neil: *Because he's my family, my son. You don't have no issues or qualms about it, you just do it and get on with it. I'd rather him live with me than go in care. Fair enough if I did it wrong and it went pear-shaped, I've tried, but I'd rather try than not try. Not just that, you don't know if he's going to resent you later on and finds out he could have gone to you but you didn't want him. That's going to mess him up more.*
- Lee : *Yes, when he's older?*
- Neil: *Yes, I'd rather just try and get on with it than not try at all.*

# Guilt –present and future

- Lee : *When Social Services contacted you, was there any of, “I don’t want to be any part of this?”*
- Lucas: *Yeah, there was thought of it, but I spoke to Jo, and we decided to get it sorted it. **It was never going to go away. So that was it, really.***
- Lee: *You could still have said that I don’t want to be involved?*
- Lucas: *I could have, yeah, but then if I’ve done the DNA test and then knew, **it would have never gone away, would it?***
- Lee: *In what way, what do you mean?*
- Lucas: ***Well, obviously, when she got older, and if she knew I was her dad, I would just get a load of grief, wouldn’t I?***
- Lee: *Although you say that, a lot of men haven’t done what you have done. They wouldn’t care what is in the future.*
- Lucas: ***But they said she was going to go into care.***
- Lee: *What would be upsetting about that?*
- Lucas: ***Well, I wouldn’t put Zara or Ben in care , would I? And Jo supported me, and made it a million times easier for me by sticking by me, but I couldn’t have had her go in care, because what kind of person would that have made me , for one stupid mistake that I wish never happened***

# Self-censure and maintaining the moral self

- Moral condemnation is not only from oneself, and a possible future meeting with their child, but also the expectations of the father's family and wider network
- "Their pain was exacerbated by accusations from their other children, relatives and friends that they had allowed the removal to occur, by their sense that no one recognised their grief, and by their self accusations." (Baum and Negbi 2013 pg.1684)



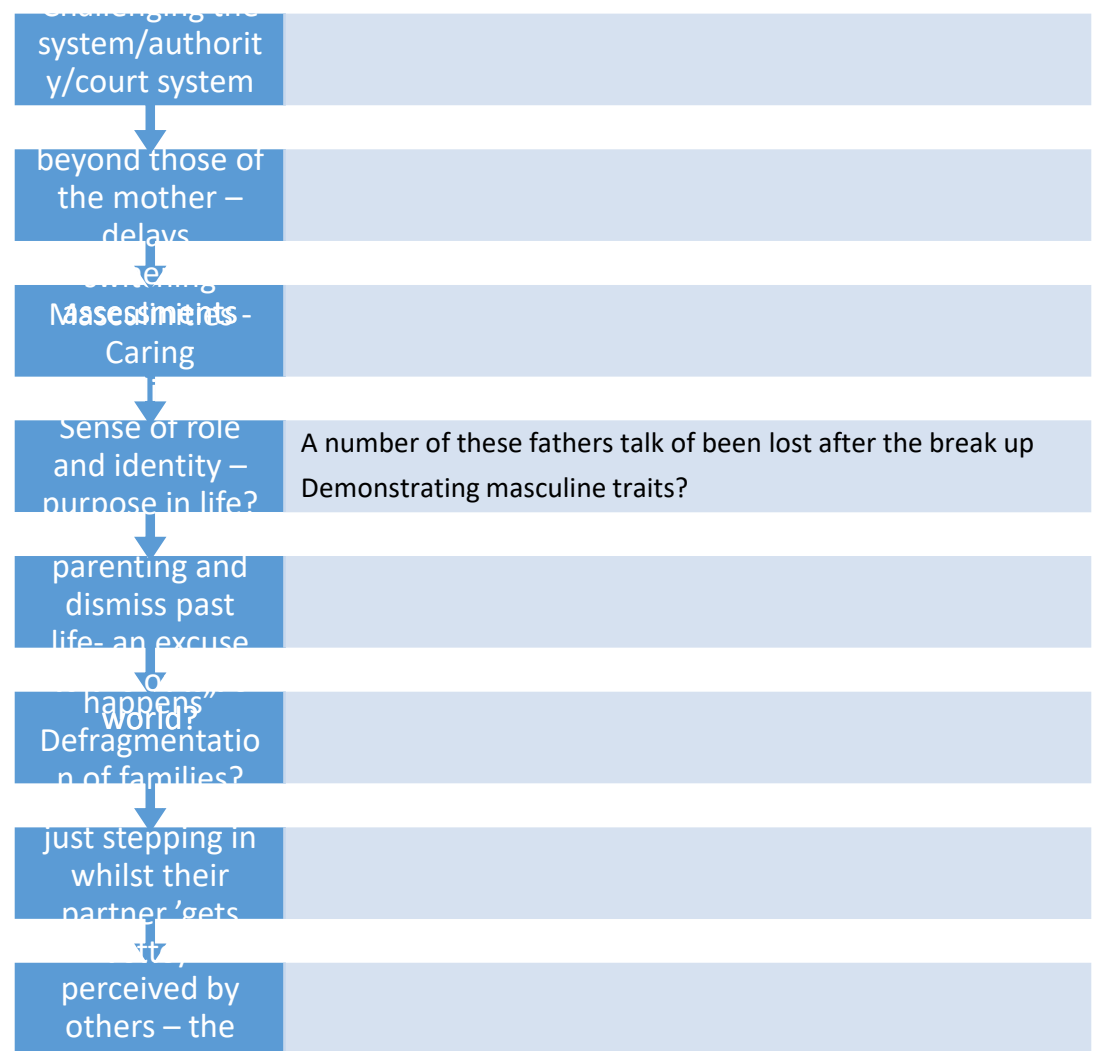
# Pressure from the wider family

- Graham: Yes. *If I went out and I slept with a bird and now she was pregnant, and it were a one night stand like, I would do the same thing because I would hate the thought of having a child that were growing up and I didn't know them and I didn't have something to do with them and I think with Jason now, **and like my mam says, 'You've got to fight for him because even if you don't get to see him he will know that you fought for him,' and I do and especially having fought for my other two. I think yes, I want Jason to know that I'm fighting for him and to know when he is older that I fought for him, do you know what I mean?***

# Self-censure and maintaining the moral self

- Abdel: *There's so much more. They have to make sure they do so much more, the work, especially with the other half as well. **My mum she was to come here, she told me I'm scared for them. I don't have no option, you know.***
- Abdel: *Yes. So, I know it's hard... I know it's hard, **even my mum she told me it's hard, with her a single mum...**but the reasons why I'm doing it you see my daughter she's not going to go, so when I get used to her... I feel sorry for her...she's my daughter.*

# Further Emerging Themes



# Further Emerging themes

## Guilt

- For not acting sooner
- Perceived or Future guilt if no action is taken

## Reparation – “making things right”

- Of their own childhood - making –giving them a childhood they never had
- For the break up of the relationship

## Rescuers

- These men appear to have been attracted to partners whom they wished to rescue
- The majority of men have said that they didn't't know their partners had problem when they met them
- Their timelines and narratives suggest that they have rescued throughout their lives

## Love?



# Emerging themes – the Social Workers

- 9 Child Protection Social Workers (8 female)
- Challenge the fathers on a moral standpoint
- Willing to look beyond behaviour/characteristics/past and present behaviour – Heroin/Methadone, Drinking, violence, gambling
- The consistency and commitment of the father was good indicator of success
- When fathers were engaged – “what you see is what you get”
- Early engagement with fathers is essential
- Look for flexible solutions and interventions

- Thank you and any questions?

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